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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
Thirteenth session
17 January-4 February 1994

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AT ITS THIRTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Teresita QUINTOS-DELES (Philippines)

Addendum

REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON

1. In her introductory statement, the Chairperson of the Committee gave an overview of the activities undertaken in the past 12 months and the results achieved. In an effort to increase the visibility of the Committee, she had participated, in her capacity as chairperson, at the thirty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the World Conference on Human Rights, the meetings of the Third Committee of the General Assembly during its discussion of the agenda item entitled "Advancement of Women" and other international conferences and events. She had frequently been confronted with a regrettable lack of knowledge about the Convention and the Committee. The limited financial and human resources of the secretariat were one of the reasons why so few outreach activities could be undertaken in the past.

2. In her contacts with the specialized agencies of the United Nations, in particular the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), she had received positive feedback and indications of possible cooperation, e.g., in the field of human rights education and the treatment of the rights of the girl-child. She emphasized the important activities undertaken by NGOs active in women's human rights and suggested investigating ways to utilize their contributions more actively.

3. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna represented a milestone for the recognition of the human rights of women. She noted that CEDAW suggestion No. 4 had been a useful tool in drawing up the resolution elaborated by the Commission on the Status of Women for the World Conference on Human Rights, and she supported the efforts of NGOs in amending the final document of the World Conference. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action recognized the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as an important international instrument in the field of women's human rights. It also put the Committee on an equal footing with other human rights treaty bodies. Concerning the plans being elaborated by the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat for the implementation of the Vienna Declaration, she said that the Committee should react immediately and suggest action on the areas.

4. Concerning the working methods of the Committee, the Chairperson suggested introducing a new procedure for the examination of the reports of States parties, in particular for the formulation of final observations, following procedures adopted by other human rights treaty bodies. She suggested that the Committee consider entrusting an expert, or experts, to take the lead in studying each report. The Committee might consider preparing questions on initial reports in the same way as it had prepared questions for second and subsequent reports.

5. With regard to reservations to the Convention, neither the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action nor the recommendations of the persons chairing human rights treaty bodies had gone further than the previous proposals for reconsideration and withdrawal of reservations by States parties.

6. Delay in the submission of reports due by States parties should be considered a violation of international obligations and should not prevent the Committee from examining the situation in a particular country and reaching final conclusions. She pointed out the need to prepare the Committee's contribution to the International Conference on Population and Development and to the World Summit for Social Development. The Committee might also wish to reflect on its input to the Fourth World Conference on Women, in addition to the compendium already foreseen. She emphasized the need to give effective expression to the recommendations on articles 9, 15 and 16, and suggested that the agreed-upon text might be edited to make it more accessible, concise and flexible.

WAYS AND MEANS OF IMPLEMENTING ARTICLE 21 OF THE CONVENTION

7. The Committee considered ways and means of implementing article 21 of the Convention at its ... and ... meetings on ... January 1994.

8. The item was introduced by the Deputy Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, who presented the report prepared by the secretariat.

WAYS AND MEANS OF EXPEDITING THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

9. The Committee considered ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its ... and ... meetings on ... January 1994.

10. The item was introduced by the Deputy Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, who presented the report prepared by the secretariat.

11. A representative of the Centre for Human Rights informed the Committee that the issue of the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by women had been reflected in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

12. The Conference had set the goal of universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the year 2000, and had taken particular note of the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its eleventh session, in January 1992, which had urged that the overall issue of reservations to human rights conventions be placed on the agenda of the World Conference on Human Rights.

13. She emphasized that the World Conference on Human Rights had also stressed the importance of working towards the elimination of violence against women, as well as the elimination of all forms of sexual harassment, exploitation and trafficking in women, gender-bias in the administration of justice and the eradication of any conflicts that might arise between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism.

14. She drew the Committee's attention to the recommendation of the World Conference regarding a human rights education decade, the preparation of which had subsequently been adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/127 of 20 December 1993.

15. The World Conference had recommended that steps should be taken to increase cooperation and promote further integration of objectives and goals between the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Human Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, and other United Nations agencies. In that context, it had also called for strengthened cooperation between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Centre for Human Rights.

16. She outlined the work that had been carried out by other human rights treaty bodies, with particular reference to the human rights of women.

17. She also drew the Committee's attention to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1992/46 of 8 March 1993, entitled "Integrating the rights of women into the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations", which encouraged closer cooperation between the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and other treaty bodies. In order to implement some of the provisions of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the Centre for Human Rights intended to establish a focal point on women's issues in the office of the

Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, to deal with matters relating to the human rights of women within the Centre, as well as system-wide, especially in view of the upcoming Fourth World Conference on Women.

18. She emphasized that, in view of the increasing backlog of reports and other matters awaiting consideration, both the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had decided to request the holding of additional sessions in 1994. Similarly, the Human Rights Committee had asked that its forthcoming summer session be extended by one week to allow additional time for the Committee to deal with the heavy backlog of communications under the Optional Protocol and reports from States parties.

19. Replying to the questions raised by many experts concerning cooperation between the Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women, the representative of the Centre stated that, over the past couple of months, there had been a number of high-level contacts between the Centre and the Division with a view to increasing cooperation between the two bodies.

20. With regard to NGOs, the representative of the Centre reported that both the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had taken steps to involve NGOs in their work and had set aside time for them to make oral statements. NGOs had also provided materials in conjunction with the consideration of country reports.

21. At its 250th meeting, the Committee held a general discussion of its functioning, its relationship with other human rights treaty bodies and the secretariat servicing of the Committee.

22. Many members noted that the work programme of the Committee had been increasing and had reached a level that was too heavy to ensure that the results would be of the quality expected of the Committee. The number of periodic reports being considered during each session was too large for the time available and much higher than for other treaty bodies. One expert noted that the uniformity of the presentation and consideration of the reports had resulted in a somewhat mechanical approach to that function.

23. It was stated that the nature of the Committee's activities had changed in the wake of the World Conference on Human Rights and that its sphere of activity now extended beyond merely reviewing reports. The function of providing commentaries on articles of the Convention through general recommendations and contributions to significant United Nations conferences and events had expanded. It was pointed out that the effort to provide general recommendations had perhaps proceeded at too rapid a pace, and the Committee should consider slowing the pace in order to ensure that the quality of the final recommendations would meet the highest professional standards.

24. It was noted that the restriction on meeting time for the Committee was a significant factor contributing to its difficulties in completing its work programme.

25. A number of suggestions were made relating to the organization of work. The possibility of designating experts to specialize in initial reports to be

considered at the next session, as had been discussed at past sessions of the Committee, was raised, as was the possibility of regionally based pre-session meetings. The idea of using electronic-communication technology to facilitate communications among experts and with the secretariat was also discussed. Members suggested having the Bureau of the Committee meet with the secretariat, in advance of sessions, in order to plan the work. The need to emphasize analytical rather than clarificatory questions was advanced. It was noted that not all experts had provided the pre-session Working Group with questions that could be taken into account in preparing the questions sent to the reporting States. One member suggested that the report of the pre-session Working Group be reviewed before the questions were sent to the respective States. Another suggestion put forward was that, in order to allow adequate time for organizational matters, no reports should be considered on the first day of the session.

26. Many members emphasized the need to provide orientation to newly elected members. It was suggested that some form of orientation manual be prepared, that communications with new members commence during the year of their election and that time be set aside at the beginning of the session during which new members were welcomed in order to provide orientation.

27. Most experts expressed concern about the quality of servicing provided to the Committee. One expert stated that the servicing had been the worst in the history of the Committee. Others noted that the transfer of the Division for the Advancement of Women from Vienna had hampered servicing. In principle, the Committee should receive the same level and quality of servicing as other human rights treaty bodies.

28. It was stated that the Committee had not received adequate professional support in terms of the legal expertise needed by the Committee; the Chairperson had not been adequately supported by the secretariat; and there was insufficient secretarial and other support. It was suggested that the Secretary-General establish an identifiable unit that would work with the Committee throughout the year, which could provide communication with members, service initiatives taken by the Chairperson and be a focal point for requests for information about the Committee and advisory services. The importance of filling the now vacant position, formerly occupied by the Secretary of the Committee, with a highly qualified professional, was emphasized. It was important to know, at the outset of the session, which individual staff members of the secretariat had been assigned to what tasks, so that experts could be clear about whom to approach on specific matters.

29. Concern was expressed about the speed with which translations had been made available to the Committee.

30. The Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, as the official responsible for supervising the work of the Division for the Advancement of Women as secretariat for the Committee, replied to questions. She stressed the changed political role of the Committee in the aftermath of the World Conference on Human Rights. She noted that the problem of resource levels was common to all units in the United Nations system dealing with women's issues and that the transfer of the Division from Vienna had involved logistical

problems that had hampered servicing. She said that those problems should not be taken as an excuse for failings in the servicing of the session. She had made efforts to improve coordination with the Centre for Human Rights. She stated that a specific unit should be created within the Division for the Advancement of Women to deal with women's human rights, including the servicing of the Committee. That would improve the career prospects of staff and ensure mobilization of technical support to the Committee.

V. PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE FOURTEENTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE

31. The Committee considered item 7, relating to the provisional agenda for the fourteenth session of the Committee, at its ... and ... meetings on ... January 1994.

32. The Deputy Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women introduced the proposed agenda. 1/

33. On the basis of the report of Working Group I, the Committee decided, at its ...th meeting, to approve the following provisional agenda:

1. Opening of the session.

2. Solemn declaration by new members of the Committee.

3. Election of officers.

4. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.

5. Background report of the Chairperson on the activities undertaken during the year.

6. Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

   Documentation

   Report of the Secretary-General on the status of submission of reports by States parties under article 18 of the Convention

   Reports of States parties to be considered at the fourteenth session

7. Implementation of article 21 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

   Documentation

   Note by the Secretary-General on reports provided by specialized agencies

Report of the secretariat: analysis of article 2 of the Convention

Report of the secretariat on the implications for the work of the Committee of the priority themes of the Commission on the Status of Women

8. Ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee.

Documentation

Report of the secretariat on ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee

9. Consideration of the report of the fifth meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies and action taken by the General Assembly concerning treaty bodies.

Documentation

Report of the fifth meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies

10. Contribution of the Committee to forthcoming international conferences.

Documentation

Report of the secretariat transmitting the draft of the compendium in the achievements of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Notes

1/ CEDAW/C/1994/6, annex II.